

Selicour. But let that be a lesson to you for the future!

La Roche. Oh certainly, you shall see —

Selicour. Enough. Let it be.

La Roche. He has taken the bait. He is already as good as caught! How much faster one gets on with knavery than with honesty. (*Exit.*)

Selicour. Now directly to that Michel, the valet! — An affair of love, I see, is at the bottom of it. Without the slightest doubt. — Capital! I have you there, Narbonne! You are, then, a frail creature too — You are also a human being, and have certain weaknesses — and I am your master. (*Exit.*)

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Enter **La Roche.**

They are still at table — The minister will come out of the room directly. — I am quite out of breath by running so fast — But, thank Heaven, I am on the scent and know all — I've got you at last, friend Selicour! You could do nothing with the minister, so long as he was virtuous — but thank God for his vices! There are secrets to be kept dark, services to be rendered! And the confidant, the pander has an easy game — He thinks he has found out one of the minister's little foibles — What a fine scope for his baseness! — Go on, go on! We are much better informed, friend Selicour! —

and you have no idea that we are laying a very, very bad snare for you. — The minister is coming — courage! Now is the time to deal the decisive blow. —

SCENE II.

Narbonne. La Roche.

Narbonne. What do I see? Is it you again who have caused me to be sent for.

La Roche. May this be the last interview you grant me, Mr. de Narbonne, if I don't succeed in convincing you this time. — But your own honour, and mine, demand that I insist upon it — All I have as yet tried to do, in order to injure this Selicour in your good opinion, has turned out to his honour, and to my own confusion — nevertheless I don't give up the hope of finally unmasking him.

Narbonne. That goes too far — my patience is at an end!

La Roche. One word, Mr. de Narbonne! You are looking for rooms in the suburbs just now, don't you?

Narbonne. How? What is that?

La Roche. They are to be taken for a lady, who, with her whole family, is suffering the bitterest want. Am I not right?

Narbonne. How? What? You presume to track my steps?

La Roche. Don't be angry — I have only imitated your friend Selicour. It was he who first managed to get this piece of news out of your valet this morning. — He immediately put the most offensive construction upon the matter. I, on the other

hand, have reason to think quite differently of it. For, to be quite candid, I made more particular enquiries — I went there — I saw the lady in question — (*laughing*) she is a matron of a very respectable number of years — Selicour fancies her to be a young beauty — Oh don't be indignant, I beg of you — let him come! Listen to him to the end, and if you don't find him out to be a perfect rogue, I will be one as long as I live. — There he comes. I'll be off at once, in order that you may get to the bottom of it all directly. (*Exit.*)

Narbonne. The desperate man! How thoroughly his passion blinds him! How? Selicour could — No, no, no, no, impossible! utterly impossible!

SCENE III.

Narbonne. Selicour.

Selicour (*aside*). He is alone! Now I can broach the subject! — If I don't look sharp and render myself indispensable to him now, this Firmin will sneak into his favour. — Let once his secret be mine, and he will be in my power altogether.

Narbonne. I was thinking just now, my dear Selicour, what the government will say about your essay — I forwarded it directly; it is being read this very moment, and I don't doubt, that it will meet with the fullest approbation.

Selicour. All my wishes are satisfied, if it meets with yours. (*Aside*). How shall I begin? — I can't risk anything by it, for it is all true. I'll go straight at it. —

Narbonne. You appear to be lost in thoughts, my dear Selicour!

Selicour. Yes — I — I was just thinking, what malicious construction slander can put on the most innocent things.

Narbonne. What do you mean by that?

Selicour. It must be told — I must not keep it secret any longer — Evil tongues have presumed to asperse your character — Rumor goes — I beg you to answer a few questions, and to pardon my anxious friendship, if I should seem to be wanting in modesty.

Narbonne. Ask me! I will answer everything.

Selicour. If I may believe your valet, you are looking for rooms in the suburbs.

Narbonne. Since you know it — yes, I do.

Selicour. And quite secretly, I hear.

Narbonne. I have, until now at least, kept it secret.

Selicour. For an unmarried lady?

Narbonne. Yes.

Selicour. Who is very — (*hesitating*) very dear to you.

Narbonne. I don't deny it, I take a great interest in her.

Selicour (*aside*). He acknowledges it openly — the story is true. — And you would like to avoid attracting attention, don't you?

Narbonne. If it were possible, yes!

Selicour. Ah, well! Well, I understand. The affair is of a tender kind, and people judge so maliciously. — But I can be of great use to you.

Narbonne. You?

Selicour. Yes, I can; rely upon me.

Narbonne. But how, pray?

Selicour. I procure you what you want.

Narbonne. But how? What do you mean?

Selicour. I've got it. I procure you a quiet little cottage, secluded — simple from without and unsuspecting, but its interior most luxuriously fitted up — furniture and paper after the latest fashion — a private apartment — heavenly and delicious — in short — the finest boudoir to be found anywhere.

Narbonne (*aside*). Should La Roche be right after all — (*aloud*) And what secret reason could I have for seeking such a lodging?

Selicour (*smiling*). In matters which one is anxious to hide from me, I know how to curb any prying curiosity of mine — However, recognise in me an ever ready and obsequious friend. — There is nothing I am not prepared to do, in order to gratify you. Give me what commands you please, I shall obey without asking any questions. — You understand me.

Narbonne. Perfectly.

Selicour. One must have forbearance — As for myself, I set a high value on good morals — But as regards this point — provided a man avoid public scandal — Perhaps I go too far in this — but my good heart carries me away, and my greatest wish is to see you happy.

SCENE IV.

The same. Michel.

Michel. Somebody has just left these letters.

Narbonne (*to Selicour*). They are for you.

Selicour. With your permission! They are business letters which require to be despatched forth-

with. — Quick to work, and quick to play. That's my way! (*Exit.*)

SCENE V.

Narbonne (*alone*).

I can scarcely recover from my astonishment — This Selicour — yes, now I have no longer any doubt that this Selicour was the vile accomplice of my predecessor — I don't pretend to be better than others; every one has his faults — but to offer himself with such brazen-faced effrontery — And to this worthless scamp I was on the point of sacrificing my child — with this traitor I was going to deceive the state? — He offers to do everything for me, out of friendship he says. Are those our friends who pander to our vices?

SCENE VI.

Narbonne. La Roche.

La Roche. Well, he has just left you — may I ask? —

Narbonne. I have been mistaken about you and him. You have rendered me an important service, Mr. La Roche, and I am ready at last to do you justice in return.

La Roche (*with joyful emotion*). Am I at length acknowledged to be an honest man? May I again carry my head erect?

Narbonne. You have succeeded — You have unmasked the deceiver — But how am I to renounce a conviction, established so long, that genius and

talent are never found to dwell in a depraved heart? — This man, whom I now find to be a worthless fellow—he has this very day delivered into my hands a memoir which the greatest statesman and author might be proud of — Is it possible? I don't understand it — Notions so sound, and so much talent in so despicable a character! I have immediately sent the memoir to the government, and I'll bet, that the letters I have just received are full of his praises. *(He opens one of the letters and reads.)* Quite so! it is just as I said!

La Roche. I cannot make it out — Is the essay really good?

Narbonne. It is excellent!

La Roche. Then I would bet, he is not the author!

Narbonne. But who could it be?

La Roche. Not he, I'll stake my soul — for, after all, I would sooner admit him to be a kind-hearted fellow than a man of parts. — If one were to try an experiment — Yes! — all right — I've got it — That must succeed — Mr. de Narbonne! if you will assist me, he shall betray himself.

Narbonne. But how?

La Roche. Let me manage — He is coming! Kindly lend me your assistance!

SCENE VII.

The same. Selicour.

La Roche *(passionately)*. Good Heavens! What a terrible misfortune!

Selicour. What is the matter, Mr. La Roche?

La Roche. What a change in one brief moment!

Selicour. What is the matter with you? What does this lamentation, this cry of terror, mean?

La Roche. I am like one struck by lightning!

Selicour. But what is it all about?

La Roche. This fatal letter — the minister has just received it — (*to Narbonne*) May I? shall I?

Narbonne. Tell him everything.

La Roche. He has been turned out of office!

Selicour. For God's sake!

La Roche. Dismissed!

Selicour. It is not possible!

La Roche. 'Tis but too true! There were some reports of it flying about a little while ago; I would not believe them, I hurried hither to get at the truth of these reports, and now the minister confirms them himself.

Selicour. Then this dreadful news is true?

(*Narbonne confirms it by a sign.*)

LAST SCENE.

The same. Mrs. Belmont. Charlotte. Both Firmins,

La Roche. Come, Madam! Come, Mr. Firmin! —

Mrs. Belmont. What is the matter?

La Roche. Console our master — cheer him up in his misfortune!

Mrs. Belmont. His misfortune!

Charlotte. Good gracious! What does that mean?

La Roche. He has been turned out of his position.

Charlotte. Great Heavens!

Selicour. I am as much astonished as you are!

Mrs. Belmont. Who could foresee such a misfortune!

Charles Firmin (*passionately*). Then, talent is proscribed, and honesty is a crime in this corrupted country! The honest man maintains himself hardly a single day, and fortune favours only the wicked.

Narbonne (*very gravely*). Not so hasty, young man! — Heaven is just, and sooner or later the guilty one will get his due.

Selicour. But tell me! Don't you at least know the cause of this unhappy occurrence?

La Roche. Alas, it is but too well known. A certain memoir has brought about the whole misfortune.

Firmin (*eagerly*). A memoir? (*To the minister*). The same perhaps which I saw you reading to-day.

Selicour. In which the government itself was criticized with a candour, a boldness —

La Roche. Quite so! The very same.

Selicour. Well, there it is! Was I wrong in saying that it was not always advisable to speak the truth?

Narbonne. I never waver where duty calls. And whatever the consequences may be, I shall never repent having done my duty.

Selicour. Well said! no doubt! but it costs you a very good position indeed.

La Roche. And that is not all! Others might very easily lose theirs too. — It is well known that a minister is rarely himself the author of the papers that issue from his office.

Selicour. How? How so?

La Roche (*aside*). With that fellow every blow tells!

Firmin. Explain yourself more clearly!

La Roche. They absolutely want to find out the author of that forcibly written memoir.

Selicour. Will they? And he would probably be involved in the fall of the minister?

La Roche. Certainly! That is to be apprehended.

Selicour. Well, I am not the author.

Firmin. I am!

Narbonne. What do I hear?

Mrs. Belmont. What? You, Mr. Firmin?

Firmin. Yes, I am the author, and I am proud of it.

La Roche (*to Narbonne*). Well, did I not tell you so?

Firmin. I could gladly leave to Mr. Selicour the glory of this essay, but neither the danger nor the responsibility for it — I have been silent up till now, but now I must speak.

Charles. That is right, dear father! that is speaking like a man of honour. — Be proud of your misfortune, Mr. de Narbonne! — My father cannot have written anything deserving punishment — Oh my heart tells me that this accident may be a source of happiness — Charlotte will no longer be sacrificed to circumstances — Greatness vanishes, and my timid love takes courage.

Mrs. Belmont. What do I hear! Mr. Firmin!

Firmin. Pardon the warmth of his sympathy; his full heart does not find the right words for his feelings!

Narbonne. Now, every one of you has betrayed his secret — Mr. Firmin! You are the author of

the memoir, it is, therefore, but right and fair that you should also reap the glory and benefit of it. — You are appointed ambassador by the government. — (*Whilst all show signs of astonishment*). Yes, I am still minister, and I am very glad of it, since I have it in my power to reward true merit.

Mrs. Belmont. What is that?

Selicour (*in the greatest alarm*). What have I done!

Narbonne (*to Selicour*). You see, your tricks are laid bare — We know you now, hypocrite that you are, professing to be a man of talent and virtue! — Vile knave, could you suppose me to be on a par with yourself?

La Roche. What a mean construction he put on a noble deed! I know it all from the lady herself. She, for whom he fancied you to have an improper inclination — is an infirm old woman, the widow of a well deserving officer, who lost his life in the service of his country, and to whom you paid the debt of the state.

Narbonne. No more about it, I beg of you! — (*To Selicour.*) You see, you are not wanted here any longer. (*Selicour withdraws silently.*)

La Roche. I pity the poor rogue — I knew beforehand that my hatred would abate as soon as his glory should be at an end.

Firmin (*pressing his hand gently*). Never mind, we will try to console him.

La Roche. All right, I'll assist you!

Narbonne (*to Charles*). Our lively young friend has all of a sudden become quite silent — I have read something in your heart, my dear Firmin! I

am indebted to surprise for the knowledge of your secret, and shall never forget that your love was kept modestly in the background during our prosperity, and only made itself known in our adversity. — Charlotte (*she throws herself without speaking a word into her father's arms.*) Well, we understand each another! Expect everything from your father's love.

La Roche. And I'll take my oath, Charles Firmin is the real author of the poem.

Mrs. Belmont. Is it possible?

Charlotte (*with a tender look at Charles.*) I never doubted it! (*Charles kisses her hand fervently.*)

Mrs. Belmont. Oh the modest young man! — He will certainly make our child happy!

Narbonne. Follow in the footsteps of your father, and I will joyfully accept you as my son-in-law — (*Half to the actors, and half to the spectators.*) This time merit has got the victory — it is not always so! The meshes of deceit ensnare the best; the honest man cannot force his way through; sneaking mediocrity gets on better than aspiring genius; pretense rules the world, and justice is to be found only on the stage.



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